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AUTHOR Wetig, Saundra L.
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ABSTRACT

This research study centered on 10 teachers who served in the leadership role of clinical instructor in a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership, Project Partnership. The purpose of the study was to identify, using a case study approach, how teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership defined leadership, described the personal/professional characteristics needed to serve in this role, and identified the supports and professional development opportunities and the benefits and challenges of involvement in a PDS partnership. Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with 10 teachers who served in the clinical instructor role in Project Partnership during the 1999-2000 and 2000-01 school years. The research indicates that participants, in their role as clinical instructors, defined and described the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of leadership in common terms. In addition, their involvement in the clinical instructor role enabled them to view themselves as leaders, changed their relationships with their professional colleagues, helped them to become better leaders, and promoted a new appreciation for persons in leadership positions. Finally, clinical instructors predominantly viewed themselves as transformational leaders. (Contains 14 references.) (Author/SM)

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'Step Up' or 'Step Out?': Perspectives on Teacher Leadership

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Saundra L. Wetig, Ed. D.
University of Nebraska at Omaha
Teacher Education
College of Education
314 Kayser Hall, Suite E
Omaha, NE 68182-0163
swetig@mail.unomaha.edu
(402) 554-2807

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ABSTRACT

Preparing future teachers, engaging in professional development events, and continually conducting inquiry into improving personal and professional practice are just a few of the leadership activities of teachers in Professional Development Schools (PDSs). The focus of this research study was centered on ten teachers who served in the leadership role of clinical instructor in a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership--Project Partnership. The purpose of this study was to identify, using a case study approach, how teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership (a) defined leadership, (b) described the personal/professional characteristics needed to serve in this role, (c) identified the supports and professional development opportunities, as well as (d) the benefits and challenges of involvement in a PDS partnership.

Initial and follow-up interviews were conducted with ten teachers who served in the clinical instructor role in Project Partnership during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. The research indicated that the participants, in their role as clinical instructors in Project Partnership, defined and described the roles, responsibilities, and characteristics of leadership in common terms. In addition, their involvement in the clinical instructor role enabled them to view themselves as leaders, changed their relationships with their professional colleagues, helped them to become better leaders, and promoted a new appreciation for persons in leadership positions. Finally, clinical instructors predominately viewed themselves as transformational leaders.

Introduction

This study was centered on teachers who serve in the leadership role of clinical instructor in the Midwest University-Midwest Local School District Professional Development School Partnership and their perspectives of engagement in a PDS. Professional Development Schools (PDSs), first proposed by the Holmes Group in 1986, have been seen as a potentially promising approach to improving the currency of university faculty, the relevancy of pre-service teachers' experiences, and the involvement of practicing teacher in teaching and learning conversations of inquiry. Ultimately, it is hoped that the conversations and connections made between university faculty and K-12 faculty will lead to increased learning by public school students (Blocker & Mantle-Bromley, 1997).

A PDS partnership seeks to improve teaching (pre-service and inservice) and contribute to the research and development of the teaching profession. Vital components of a PDS include linkage between theory and practice, regular presence of university teacher educators on-site at the partner school, and collaboration of university and public school professionals on the pre-service/inservice course work and practicum experiences delivered at the PDS site.

Preparing future teachers, engaging in professional development events, and continually conducting inquiry into improving personal and professional practice are just a few of the leadership activities of teachers in Professional Development Schools (PDSs). Livingston (1992) stated that engagement in "leadership roles empowers teachers to actualize their professional worth in concrete fundamental ways..." (p. 58). For more than a century teachers have assumed informal and formal leadership roles in schools. They have served informally as study group facilitators, planners, initiators, developers, problem-solvers, nurturers, as well as catalysts for individual and school-wide improvement. Teachers have served formally as team leaders, department chairpersons, mentors, master teachers, grade level chairpersons, curriculum coordinators, consultants, and more recently as clinical instructors in PDS partnerships. Clinical instructors in a PDS have been defined as school-based educators, who, while continuing to maintain a significant role in the classroom, assume responsibilities involved in teacher preparation, entry-year support, and participate in on-going professional development at both the school and college (Collinson & Sherrill; 1996; Shroyer & Hancock, 1997; Teitel, 1997).

Clinical instructors actively engage in many informal and formal leadership roles inside PDS partnerships. Since its inception in 1986, the PDS concept has gained widespread attention among educators, legislators, policy-makers, researchers, journalists, and funders (Clark, 1999). PDSs have been viewed as innovative types of restructured schools designed to be partnerships for the "simultaneous renewal" of schools and teacher education programs (Goodlad, 1988). Restructuring efforts in the PDS have included: (a) changes in organizational and governance structures, (b) redesign of teacher work, (c) reallocation of resources, (d) improvements in the process of teaching and learning, and (e) changes in the relationships between and among teachers, administrators, school districts, pupils, parents, and higher education institutions (Abdal-Haqq, 1998).

One of the underlying premises of the PDS model is the continued professional development of experienced educators at school and college levels. For many clinical instructors involved in a PDS, the 'step up' to leadership has required a 'step out' of the classroom (Livingston, 1992). The roles outside of the classroom involve issues of power, authority, decision making, and different kinds of collaboration. The Holmes Group (1986) stated that the improvement and professionalization of teaching depend ultimately on providing teachers with opportunities to contribute to the development of knowledge in their profession, to form collegial relationships beyond their immediate working environment, and to grow intellectually as they mature professionally.

A PDS partnership seeks to improve teaching (pre-service and inservice) and contribute to the research and development of the teaching profession. Participation in a PDS transforms the roles of those serving in leadership roles from both the university and public schools. PDSs, as they evolve, create conditions that open opportunities and demand more of leaders in the PDS model as well as give rise to new, more collaborative definitions of leadership (Teitel, 1997).

Creating authentic collaborative relationship between schools and universities demands new roles for teacher leaders, as well as time for collegial decision-making, classroom research, and mentoring of pre-service teachers. An essential element of the PDS is the concept of teachers as professionals (Holmes Group, 1986; Levine & Gendler, 1988). Teachers are envisioned as knowledgeable and committed professionals with greater decision-making power concerning their work, and willingness to accept responsibility for their judgments (Collinson & Sherrill, 1996). Collinson and Sherrill (1996) noted that even though research efforts had been very thorough in examining most of the major components in teacher education (i.e., students, cooperating teachers, and program structure), the research literature of teacher education is remarkably silent on the topic regarding leadership roles of clinical instructors in the PDS model.

Methodology & Research Questions

This study was designed to gain new, more accurate insights into teachers' views as they served in the leadership role of clinical instructor. Teachers serving in the clinical instructor role act as mentors, role-models, liaisons between the PDS school sites and the university, trouble-shooters, problem-solvers, supervisors, researchers, and professional developers. This study focused on ten elementary teachers involvement in the leadership role of clinical instructor and their perspectives of involvement in Project Partnership. The major research questions that guided this inquiry are:

- Question 1: How do teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor define 'leaders' and 'leadership'?
- Question 2: What personal and/or professional characteristics are needed to serve in the leadership role of clinical instructor?
- Question 3: What organizational supports do clinical instructors receive to assist them in carrying out the role of clinical instructor?

- Question 4: What professional development opportunities are available to assist clinical instructors in improving professional practice?
- Question 5: What are the benefits and challenges of a leadership role in a PDS?

This research study was designed to answer the questions above through the use of a naturalistic research design. The naturalistic design included two surveys in the form of questionnaires, two interviews, fieldnotes, and participant observation. In qualitative research, beliefs rather than facts form the basis of perception. This study focused on the personal interactions of clinical instructors within the context of Project Partnership. Therefore, qualitative methodology was used to determine clinical instructors individual perspectives of their leadership role in a PDS.

Researcher's Role

Participant observation occurred in the Project Partnership schools, Project Partnership meetings, and local and state PDS conferences. Due to a lengthy field engagement which began in September 1998 and continued through May 2000, I was able to establish rapport with the Project Partnership Coordinator and the teachers assigned to the role of clinical instructor during the 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 school years. As a passive participant in meetings, conferences, and site observations, I kept fieldnotes which captured insight into the clinical instructor roles and details for the context of the study.

The Setting and Participants

Project Partnership

The Midwest University College of Education has been engaged in a Professional Development School (PDS) partnership for over ten years with three area school districts (Midwest Local School District , District B, and District C). Represented within the three school districts are twelve elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The majority of these schools are in the Midwest Local School District, the setting of this study.

Clinical Instructors

The participants involved in this study serve as clinical instructors in the Midwest Local School District. In Project Partnership, the focus of this study, the role of clinical instructor is an appointed position. Faculty from the Midwest University in conjunction with the building administrators at each PDS site recruit, select, and appoint teachers whom they believe can fulfill the 'Clinical Instructor Roles and Responsibilities'.

Teachers who have typically served in the clinical instructor role have demonstrated an interest in the role or may have volunteered to serve in this position. Teachers serve between three and five years in the clinical instructor role. Following involvement in the clinical instructor role, many teachers resume a classroom teaching assignment within the Midwest Local School District.

Eight teachers, who served in the role of clinical instructor during the 1999-2000 school year, participated in Interview I (May 2000). Two teachers did not return to serve in the role of clinical instructor for the 2000-2001 school year. Therefore, Interview II (November 2000), included two new participants. Participants in this study were all were elementary teachers. The ten participants represented a considerable range of teaching and leadership experience.

Findings and Conclusions

The following assertions represent a summary of the findings. Sub theme I subsumed Research Questions 1 and 2, Sub theme II subsumed Research Questions 3 and 4, and Sub theme III subsumed Research Question 5. Each of the sub themes have corresponding assertions.

- **Sub theme I: *Defining Leadership***
  Addresses Research Questions 1 and 2

- Assertion 1A: Teachers who have 'stepped out' of the classroom full time described their 'step up' to leadership in common terms (e.g., visionaries, problem-solvers, organizers, and communicators). They shared common perceptions of their roles, responsibilities, and the characteristics of the clinical instructor position in a PDS.

- Assertion 1B: The 'step up' to the role of clinical instructor has not significantly changed clinical instructors' definition of leadership. However, their 'step out' of the classroom full time has changed their understanding of how leadership is enacted. Clinical instructors view themselves as leaders and believe the role has improved their leadership abilities.

- Assertion 1C: The 'step up' to the role of clinical instructor has changed relationships with professional colleagues as they 'stepped out' of the classroom full time.

- Assertion 1D: As teachers 'stepped up' to the role of clinical instructor and 'stepped out' of the classroom they began to view themselves as leaders. However, this viewpoint was not shared by their colleagues as they engaged in the leadership role of clinical instructor.

- Assertion 1E: The personal and professional characteristics identified by clinical instructors in their 'step up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor are predominately reflective of the characteristics of 'transformational' leadership.

- **Sub theme II:** ***Identifying Leadership Support***
  Addresses Research Questions 3 and 4

- Assertion 2A: Project Partnership has provided teachers who have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor with transitional supports which have assisted them as they 'stepped out' of the classroom.

- Assertion 2B: As teachers 'stepped up' and served in the role of clinical instructor, boundaries blurred as who to identify as the 'informal' and 'formal' leaders, and what to identify as 'informal' and 'formal' supports.

- **Sub theme III:** ***Recognizing the Benefits and Challenges of Leadership***
  Addresses Research Question 5

- Assertion 3A: Many benefits of involvement in a PDS were identified by the teachers who 'stepped out' of the classroom and have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

- Assertion 3B: Several challenges and/or obstacles of involvement in a PDS were identified by teachers who have 'stepped out' of the classroom full time and have 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

- Assertion 3C: The benefits of preparing future teachers, opportunities to engage in professional development, and opportunities to improve professional practice, outweighed the challenges identified by clinical instructors' as they 'stepped up' to the leadership role of clinical instructor in Project Partnership.

Implications and Recommendations

Discussion of Sub Theme I: *Defining Leadership*

Teachers serving in the leadership role of clinical instructor described their 'step up' to leadership in common terms (e.g., visionaries, problem-solvers, organizers, communicators). Not only did they describe leadership in similar terms, they also shared common perceptions of their roles and responsibilities in Project Partnership. As the teachers in the study engaged in the clinical instructor role their overall definition of leadership did not change significantly, however their understandings of how leadership was enacted did change. As teachers 'stepped up' to the role of clinical instructor and 'stepped out' of the classroom they began to view themselves as leaders. However, this viewpoint was not shared by their colleagues as they engaged in the leadership role of clinical instructor.

Clinical instructors reported that the 'step out' of the classroom impacted their relationships with their professional colleagues and also caused them to be viewed

2. If a 'list serve' or 'message board' is not a possibility, a newsletter should be developed and distributed to all PDS participants. The newsletter could include many of the components suggested above.

3. PDS participants should be encouraged to respond in a timely manner to phone calls and e-mail communication.

4. A central location should be designated within a PDS partnership to store essential memoranda and material to which all partnership members have access.

5. Teachers new to a role similar to that of the 'clinical instructor' in Project Partnership, should be given time (during leadership meetings) to engage in dialogue with former clinical instructors. Those who have served in leadership roles in a PDS could provide valuable insight and ideas of how to make a successful transition from 'classroom teacher' to 'partnership leader.'

- Of the teachers serving in the clinical instructor role during the 2000-2001 school year, six of the eight identified themselves as 'transformational' leaders. The act of identifying themselves as a particular style of leader is not as powerful as questioning how this identification with a leadership style affected their behavior in Project Partnership.

1. PDS partnerships should seek some form of diagnostic instrument (such as the Leadership Assessment Inventory used in this study) to assist in diagnosing the types of leaders in their organization.

2. Following the diagnosis leaders could be provided with opportunities to: (a) reflect on how the style dominance impacts their personal or professional interactions with colleagues, and (b) opportunities to reflect on how the style dominance may impact their personal and professional growth as leaders.

Discussion of Sub theme II: *Identifying Leadership Support*

Teachers serving in a leadership role in Project Partnership identified numerous organizational supports (e.g., clinical instructor meetings, colleagues, opportunities for professional development) which assisted them in their 'step out' of the classroom and their 'step up' to the role of clinical instructor. As they described the organizational supports, the boundaries blurred regarding who they identified as the 'informal' and 'formal' leaders, and what they identified as the 'informal' and 'formal' supports.

Sub Theme II: Implications and Recommendations

Given the assertions regarding *Identifying Leadership Support* the following suggestions are made for practice.

- Clinical instructors clearly identified transitional supports which assisted them in their 'step up' to their leadership role in Project Partnership. They did not find it crucial to distinguish between 'informal' or 'formal' supports. However, the transitional supports (e.g., meetings, opportunities for professional development, grant support, etc.) should not be overlooked or minimalized as they were crucial to clinical instructors' 'step up' to leadership.

1. PDS partnerships should support clinical instructors through regular clinical instructor meetings.

2. PDS partnerships should establish formalized meetings for their participants to provide them with a forum to discuss any questions, concerns, successes or challenges they encounter in involvement in a PDS.

3. PDS partnerships should provide opportunities for continued professional development in the form of: (a) coursework related to leadership/mentorship, (b) conferences, (c) specialized training related to leadership/mentoring, (d) opportunities to collaborate with partnership university faculty regarding PDS issues, (e) opportunities to co-teach at other PDS sites or at the partnership university, and (f) opportunities for professional development during the summer.

4. PDS partnerships should negotiate some release time for teachers in roles similar to that of the clinical instructor in Project Partnership. The release time could assist clinical instructors' in their 'step out' of the classroom, as well as provide them with the time needed to fulfill the roles, responsibilities, and commitments related to their leadership role.

5. PDS partnerships should provide opportunities for PDS participants to collaborate in grant writing to fund additional support systems for the partnership.

Discussion of Sub theme III: *Recognizing the Benefits and Challenges of Leadership*

Teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor identified many benefits (e.g., opportunities to work with pre-service teachers, opportunities to attend conferences) and challenges (e.g., low-performing pre-service teachers, time management, colleagues resistant to change) of involvement in a leadership role in Project Partnership. They found through participation in this role that the benefits of preparing

future teachers, opportunities to engage in professional development activities, and opportunities to improve professional practice, far outweighed the challenges of involvement in the leadership role of clinical instructor.

Sub Theme III: Implications and Recommendations

Given the assertions regarding *Identifying the Benefits and Challenges of Leadership* the following suggestions are made for practice.

- Project Partnership should clearly continue the use of clinical instructors in their Professional Development School.

  1. Clinical instructors are a crucial component in the development of pre-service teacher candidates. The teachers who serve in this leadership role can provide the mentorship and support pre-service teacher candidates need for a successful student teaching experience.

  2. Teachers should be encouraged to engage in nontraditional teaching roles. Schools are full of teachers who have diverse knowledge in content and pedagogy which could benefit not only the K-12 students, but the the pre-service teachers who are looking for places to practice.

  3. To assist in overcoming the obstacles of involvement in a leadership role in a PDS, clinical instructors should be provided with skills development training (e.g., training to assist in dealing with the low performing pre-service teacher candidate).

  4. If Project Partnership continues to use teachers for the leadership role of clinical instructor, I recommend that the teachers chosen for this role: (a) have the ability to articulate and analyze beliefs and practices, (b) have experience in team-teaching or collaboration, (c) have a broad professional background, (d) have prior leadership experience, (e) have the ability to serve as 'boundary-spanners,' and (f) have respect from colleagues.

Conclusion

The findings reported under each of these themes have provided a glimpse of individual and contextual factors which enabled or constrained clinical instructors growth as both 'learners' and 'leaders.' The teachers in this study defined, identified, and then 'reframed' the roles, responsibilities, and commitments related to their leadership role in a PDS. Involvement in Project Partnership broadened clinical instructors' perspectives beyond the classroom and exposed them in new and meaningful ways to the world of leadership. As they assumed leadership roles in the areas of instructional facilitation, mentoring, research, collaboration, and problem-

solving it deepened their understanding of their role as leaders. The ten participants in this study agreed that their role in Project Partnership was a valuable form of job-embedded personal development which allowed them to expand their knowledge base regarding leadership. Involvement in Project Partnership provided for many of the clinical instructors a sense of renewal and stimulation and caused them to become engaged, in the words of Lieberman and Miller (1992), "continuous inquiry into practice" (p. 106).

This study reported how teachers serving in the role of clinical instructor defined 'leaders' and 'leadership,' their identification of the personal and/or professional characteristics which assisted them in their leadership role, the supports they received as they 'stepped out' of the classroom, and the benefits and challenges of involvement in this 'step up' to leadership.

Clinical instructors in this study defined 'leaders' and 'leadership' in terms very similar to those described in the literature. Much like McEwan (1998) and Bass (1981), they too defined leaders as knowledgeable visionaries who demonstrated the ability to effectively communicate and meet the needs of others while simultaneously serving as a role-model and problem-solver.

The findings in this study also support the personal and/or professional characteristics cited by Clark (1999) as essential to PDS leadership. Clark (1999) noted that successful leaders in a PDS need certain traits which included: (a) the ability to operate in the broader community in which the PDS is located, (b) an understanding of the change process, (c) knowledge regarding content and pedagogy, and (d) knowledge of good teaching when they observe it. The characteristics identified by clinical instructors in this study were consistent with the traits identified by Clark (1999) for successful PDS leadership.

Teitel (1997) noted several organizational supports that teachers need to be successful in their leadership role in a PDS. The organizational supports he identified were: (a) time, (b) support for role change, and (c) revised reward structure. Clinical instructors in this study reported that these organizational supports were evident in Project Partnership and were crucial to their 'step up' to leadership.

Consistent with the findings of research conducted by Abdal-Haqq (1998), clinical instructors also reported benefits of involvement in a PDS which included: (a) exposure to new ideas, (b) collegial interactions with site colleagues, pre-service teachers, and university faculty, (c) a greater feeling of professionalism, and (d) opportunities to engage in nontraditional roles. The challenges they noted were similar to those identified by Abdal-Haqq (1998) and Teitel (1997) which included: (a) conflict between pre-service students and teachers, (b) pre-service teacher preparation and mentoring, and (c) colleagues resistant to change.

The purpose of this study was to gain new, more accurate insights into teachers' views as they served in a leadership role within a PDS. This study clearly contributed and added depth to the current body of research on leadership in Professional Development Schools. Teachers were allowed to voice their perspectives as they engaged in the roles of leader, mentor, supervisor, role-model, presenter, and professional developer. These perspectives add yet another layer to the existing body of research regarding leaders in PDSs. However, it is my belief that

the most prominent contribution of this study was in raising new questions: (1) Why did teachers serving in the leadership role of clinical instructor so strongly identify with the 'transformational' leadership style, and (2) Why did the role of clinical instructor so strongly impact personal and professional relationships with colleagues in Project Partnership, and (3) Why do teachers not identify these obviously transformational leadership behaviors exhibited by clinical instructors as 'formal' leaders?

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